

UNDER THE GUN 3

WESTWALL

GERMAN ARMOUR IN THE WEST, 1945

DENNIS OLIVER



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GERMAN ARMOUR IN THE WEST, 1945
DENNIS OLIVER
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Front cover: Pzkw VI Tiger I. 4 Kompanie, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506. Belgium, January 1945. Raised from Panzer-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 500 in July 1944 as Panzer Kompanie Hummel, this unit was incorporated into schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506 as its fourth company in December 1944 in time to take part in the Ardennes Offensive. The vehicle shown here was destroyed by its crew with two Tiger II tanks of the battalion near Oberwampach, northeast of Bastogne on 17 January 1945.



Left: An Sdkfz 251/22 ausf D half-track of 11.Panzer-Division. This vehicle is also shown and discussed in the colour illustrations on the outside back cover. (NARA). Right: A Panzerjäger V Jagdpanther knocked out in northern Germany by Canadian troops in March, 1945 possibly from schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 519 which was attached to 1.Arme in March or I Abteilung, Panzer Regiment 130 of the Panzer-Lehr-Division which had 15 of these vehicles and was operating against the Canadians at that time. (National Archives of Canada)

On Saturday 21 October 1944, Aachen - the burial place of Charlemagne, the city where the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire were crowned - became the first German town to fall to the western Allies. Between the end of July and the beginning of September 1944, the US, British and Canadian armies had broken through the German lines in Normandy and advanced at a heady pace, reaching the Seine a full eleven days before their most optimistic expectations. The German commanders had pinned their hopes on containing and then destroying the Allied enclave in Normandy, forbidden as they were to conduct any kind of withdrawal. When the German defences finally broke, they had neither the reserves to fill the gap nor prepared positions to fall back to west of the Rhine. Worse, an orderly retreat was no longer a possibility and almost 50,000 German soldiers were taken prisoner during this period - while some 10,000 of their comrades lay dead in Normandy. The largest natural barrier between the invasion beaches and the borders of the Reich - the River Seine - proved to be just as problematic to the retreating units of the Wehrmacht and most of the tanks and other vehicles that survived the Normandy battles were abandoned on its western side. Pressuring the Germans even further, a combined Franco-American force had landed in the south of France on 15 August and by mid-September had managed to linked up with the US 3rd Army creating a wall of Allied armies that ranged from Antwerp to the Swiss border. British and American commanders openly talked of a peace in time for Christmas.

And then the Allied advance stopped. Although their headlong rush through France and the Low Countries had been spectacularly successful they had failed to capture a port of any significance meaning that all supplies had to be transported by road from Normandy. In addition, the troops were simply exhausted.

In September an ambitious operation to restart the Allied offensive and capture a crossing of the Rhine - Operation Market Garden - was blunted by a German force based around II SS-Panzerkorps which was at least partially rested and re-equipped. One important consequence of the failure of Market Garden had been a renewal of confidence among the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, reigniting their faith that Germany was far from defeated. And indeed, the headlong retreat was over and the Germans were now falling back on strong, prepared positions. In October Heeresgruppe B, by now reduced to a number of ad hoc battle groups, held out against two US armies in the Hürtgen Forest and although Aachen fell, it was at enormous cost to the Americans. The Allied attempts to seize the Roer dams before the onset of winter were no more successful and the Germans considered this series of battles to have been a serious defeat for the Allies. Any setback however, could at best be only temporary.

On the morning of 16 December the Germans launched a powerful armoured offensive in the Ardennes - codenamed Wacht am Rhein - catching the Allies completely by surprise, the main weight of the offensive falling on a single US Army corps. In scenes reminiscent of the Blitzkrieg, two panzer armies were able to push aside the initially weak defence and drive westward towards Antwerp in an attempt to split the British and Americans. However, within days massive Allied reinforcements were able to halt the Germans short of their main objective, the River Meuse.

Although no longer capable of advancing, the Germans managed to hold many of their gains well into 1945. A table giving the numbers for fully-tracked armoured fighting vehicles on hand in December can be seen on page 3. On New Year's Eve, while Wacht am Rhein was underway, the Germans managed to mount another offensive south of the Ardennes codenamed Nordwind. This attack also enjoyed some initial successes but petered out by 25 January.

Although the Ardennes Offensive had not achieved any of its major objectives, the sudden appearance of so many well equipped and highly motivated enemy troops had proven to the Allies that the Germans were still capable of surprising them, and indeed highlighted a failure of Allied intelligence that began as early as Normandy when the difficulty of operating in the Bocage country had not been foreseen.

In January 1945, the western Allies stood on the borders of the Reich and the last major natural barrier - the Rhine - lay before them. If their failure to capture a crossing during Market Garden had boosted the confidence of the Germans, the offensives of December had shown that although victory was assured, it would be a very bloody affair indeed and that the war may drag on well into the new year.

By mid February the British and Canadians had captured Cleve, Goch and Calcar and by the first week of March the Americans had taken Cologne. In what proved to be a great surprise to both sides, the Ludendorf Bridge over the Rhine at Remagen was captured intact on 7 March.

Incredibly, many of the major German armoured formations were still intact and new units were either being planned or actually raised from training and replacement battalions. Many of these however never materialised and those that did were little more than ad hoc battle groups. Typical of these late war units was Panzer-Division Clausewitz and a detailed order of battle is given on page 33.

In late March the British crossed the Rhine at Wesel preceded by the last large paratroop drop of the war in Europe. The ground troops had no difficulty in linking up with the paratroops and by nightfall of the first day all the crossing points were secured. At almost the same time the Americans crossed the river near Oppenheim. By the end of the month the important towns of Darmstadt and Wiesbaden were in allied hands and US Army units were closing on Frankfurt-am-main encircling approximately 325,000 German troops, the remains of Heeresgruppe B and parts of Heeresgruppe A, in what was to become known as the Ruhr pocket. Fighting doggedly the last German units held out until 21 April.

Late on Wednesday 11 April, US troops reached the River Elbe just 50 miles from Berlin. This was the agreed limit of the western Allied advance and while the British in the north pressed forward, US and French forces turned south towards what was fully expected to be the German's final stand - the Alpenfestung. Indeed, the spectre of a German last ditch defence, commanded personally by Hitler and conducted by fanatical, elite units in the mountainous regions of Germany and Austria was given so much credence by the Allies that the US drive into Czechoslovakia was undertaken, in large part, to prevent German troops withdrawing into the Alpine Redoubt.

The death of Adolf Hitler on 30 April provided the catalyst for surrender - at least in the West - and on 4 May, the German command began negotiations with the British. Just three days later on Monday 7 May, General Jodl signed the instrument of unconditional surrender directing all German units to cease operations at midnight on the following day. The war was over.

The images reproduced in this book were all taken in the last few desperate months of the war. Captured on film by official Allied photographers, they allow us to see exactly how these vehicles appeared in combat - many being made just hours or days after they were captured or disabled. Inevitably, some photographs depict the unfortunate casualties of war and readers are reminded that the decision to include them was not taken lightly - the alternative being to ignore the realities of our subject matter.



Photographed in La Bourgnance on 15 November 1944 this Sdkfz 251/21 Drilling was destroyed by artillery units of the US 3rd Infantry Division. The gunner's protective shield, the sight and the breech of the right hand gun can be seen behind the additional armour on the hull side. Another gun would be directly below the site and it would appear that the left hand gun is missing. These vehicles utilised the large quantity of 1.5cm MG 151/15 or the 2cm 151/20 guns which were no longer required by the Luftwaffe. The three guns were fixed to a pedestal bolted to the floor of the crew compartment which also carried an ammunition container for each gun. This half-track shows several features indicative of late production models including the Bosch headlight and the late style road wheels with a metal ring over the hub. (NARA)



An RSO/01 (Raupenschlepper Ost) tractor captured from 19.Volkgrenadier-Division and photographed at Sierck-les-Bains in late November 1944. The division's unit insignia can be seen on the cab front just to the right of the Nutek headlight. Above that and slightly to the right is the tactical sign denoting a towed artillery unit. The cloth covering on the cab roof is a US Army aerial recognition device. Versatile and reliable, almost 23,000 of these vehicles were produced between late 1942 and the war's end by Steyr, Wanderer-Auto-Union, Graf und Stift and Klockner-Deutz-Magirus which alone manufactured 12,500 vehicles. The RSO/01 model seen here is easily identified by its rounded cab while the RSO/02 and RSO/03 both featured a more angular version. A Raupenschlepper Gebirge was also produced especially for use in mountainous regions. (NARA)



At left: The Panzer Assault Badge, this version awarded to tank crews who had taken part in 100 armoured actions. Larger than the original Panzerkampfabzeichen - an example of which can be seen on page 30 - these badges were finished to a high standard with the wreath in gilt and the centre silvered. Behind the badge is a postcard suggesting that boys of the Hitler Youth should volunteer for the armed forces. (Author's collection). Below: An RSO/03 captured intact with its 10.5cm leFH18M howitzer. Apart from the obvious modification of a simpler, straight sided cab, these vehicles were powered by a Deutz diesel engine which replaced the Steyr V8 engine used for the RSO/01. (NARA)



PANZERS IN THE WEST - DECEMBER 1944

The table below was compiled from several sources including unit histories and gives the strength of tank, anti-tank and assault gun units prior to the Ardennes Offensive. Note that only fully tracked vehicles are shown.

	Panzer III	PzBeoWag III	Bergepanzer III	Panzer IV	PzBeoWag IV	Bergepanzer IV	Pz IV/70 A	Pz IV/70 V	Jagdpanzer IV	Möbelwagen	Wirbelwind	Flakpanzer 38	Panther	Bergepanther	Jagdpanther	Sturmiger	Tiger I	Tiger II	Heizer	Nashorn	Marder III	StuG III	StuG IV	StuH 42	
2.Panzer-Division				28				3*		37	4	3	64									24			(1)
9.Panzer-Division				28						4	4		57												(2)
Panzer-Artillerie Regt 102		2		2																					
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 50								14	9													14			
11.Panzer-Division				31						7	8		47	4											(3)
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 61									14																
21.Panzer-Division				34						3	5		38												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 200			1						1																
116.Panzer-Division				21						3			41												(4)
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 228			1					11																	
Panzer-Lehr-Division				27						4	3		30	2											(5)
3.Panzergrenadier-Division	1*		2*																			41			(6)
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 3								17													7				
15.Panzergrenadier-Division	1*			14						2															(7)
Panzer-Abteilung 115																						30			
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 33																						2			
25.Panzergrenadier-Division			1					6	5	37			11												(8)
Panzer-Brigade 103																									
II/Panzer Regiment 2				6			11																		
Panzer-Brigade 106																									
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 2106				2				4		4			10									5			
Panzer-Brigade 150																									
Kampfgruppe X													5												
Kampfgruppe Y																						5			
Führer-Begleit-Brigade																									
Panzer Regiment FBB			2	17			5			4	4														
II/Panzer Regiment GD				7			38																		
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 673																						5		5	
Panzer-Artillerie Regt 120		5																							
Führer-Grenadier-Brigade																									
II/Führer-Grenadier-Brigade				8																		11			
III/Führer-Grenadier-Brigade								12		4			37	2									1*		(9)
1.SS-Panzer-Division																									
SS-Panzer Regiment 1				37							4		4	42											
Schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501																		45							
2.SS-Panzer-Division				28						4	4		58									28			
9.SS-Panzer-Division				32						8			33									28			(10)
10.SS-Panzer-Division				2				10	3	8			10	1											(11)
12.SS-Panzer-Division				37									41												
17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division			1									6										17			(12)
Panzer-Abteilung (Fkl) 301														2			27								
Panzer-Kompanie (Fkl) 319																						5			
Schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506																				42					(13)
Panzer-Komp (Flamm) 352																				10					
Panzer-Komp (Flamm) 353																				10					
Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 93																					12				
Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 519								9						4											
Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 525																					10				
Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 559				3				18		4	3														
Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 560				3				31			4			1	4										
Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654														1	20										
Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 655								31						1	9										
Heeres Panzerjäger-Abteilung 741																				12					
Sturm-Mörser Komp. 1000																	4								(14)
Sturm-Mörser Komp. 1001																	4								(15)
Stug-Abteilung 200			2																			22	9		(16)
Stug-Abteilung 243																						23	12		
Stug-Abteilung 244																						14			
Stug-Abteilung 280																						17			(17)
Stug-Abteilung 341																						10	10		(18)
Stug-Abteilung 905																								9	(19)
Stug-Abteilung 911			2																			34			(20)

(1)*Received during December. (2)3 Panther and 14 StuG were in transit on 14.12.44. (3)30 Panzer IV and 37 Panthers were in transit on 14.12.44. (4)5 Panzer IV, 23 Panther and 14 StuG were in transit on 16.12.44. (5)10 Panzer IV and 10 Panther were in transit on 8.12.44. (6)*Both these vehicles were Befehlspanzer. (7)*Befehlspanzer. (8)30 Panthers were in transit on 14.12.44. (9)*Received during December. (10)25 Panthers were in transit on 8.12.44. (11)34 Panzer IV and 25 Panthers were in transit on 8.12.44. (12)23 StuG III and 19 StuG IV on hand at the end of December. (13)6 Tigers were in transit on 10.12.44. (14)Some sources give 3 vehicles only. (15)Some sources give 3 vehicles only. (16)The correct title was Sturmgeschütz-Ersatz und Ausbildung-Abteilung 200. (17)12 StuH 42 had been on hand the previous month and it is likely that some at least were available in December. (18)5 StuG III and 7 StuH 42 in repair 16.12.44. (19)Renamed Heeres Sturmartillerie-Brigade 905 in late 1944. (20)Attached to the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade.

On the morning of 14 November 1944, elements of the US 314th Infantry Regiment of the 79th Division, advancing from Montigny south of Nancy, reached the village of Halloville, some 20 kilometres east of Luneville. Facing the Americans were the 553.Volks-Grenadier-Division to the north of the town and the 708.Volks-Grenadier-Division to the south - Halloville in fact marked the junction of the two German divisions. Realising the danger that this presented the commander of 708.Volks-Grenadier-Division ordered his men to prepare an immediate counterattack. As the German units were assembling just east of Halloville, they were struck by a combined American force made up of the 79th Division's 315th Infantry Regiment supported by tanks and tank destroyers. Caught completely by surprise the Grenadiers and their supporting assault guns of Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1708 were forced into a disorderly retreat, losing most of their armoured vehicles in the process. The official caption of this US Signal Corps photograph, taken on 17 November, is rather vague regarding the location, stating merely that it is near Halloville. However, I am almost certain that the church in the background is the l'église de Halloville which sits at the intersection of the Rue Saint-Georges and the Rue des Trois Fontaine and faces northwest towards Luneville. Although the spire of the present day church is significantly different from that seen in our photograph, a drawing of the church made in 1927 by Edmond Delorme, a noted architectural artist, is identical to that seen here. The damage to the building's roof is obvious and it may have undergone extensive restoration after the war. In all other respects the present day structure is identical and there is indeed today an open field to the east of the church. There is also an established wooded area to the south which would have helped to conceal the American advance which came from that direction. Depicted here is one of the Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzer tank destroyers of 708. Volks-Grenadier-Division, which had 14 available in November 1944. This division was formed from the remnants of 708.Infanterie-Division as part of the German Army's 32nd recruitment, referred to as Welle - literally wave - conducted between September and October 1944. All such divisions contained a Panzerjäger-Abteilung made up of a company of towed anti-tank guns, another of towed anti-aircraft guns and a Sturmgeschütz company - invariably referred to in these battalions as an Abteilung - equipped with self-propelled tank destroyers. (NARA)







Both photographs on this page were taken in northern Luxembourg near the German border between Clervaux Clerf and Hosingen sometime after the Ardennes Offensive. This photograph shows a late production Pzkw V Panther ausf G of I Abteilung, Panzer Regiment 33 of 9. Panzer-Division. Photographs of other tanks of this regiment's third company taken at the same time confirm that it was common practice to repeat the tank's number on the turret rear. (NARA)

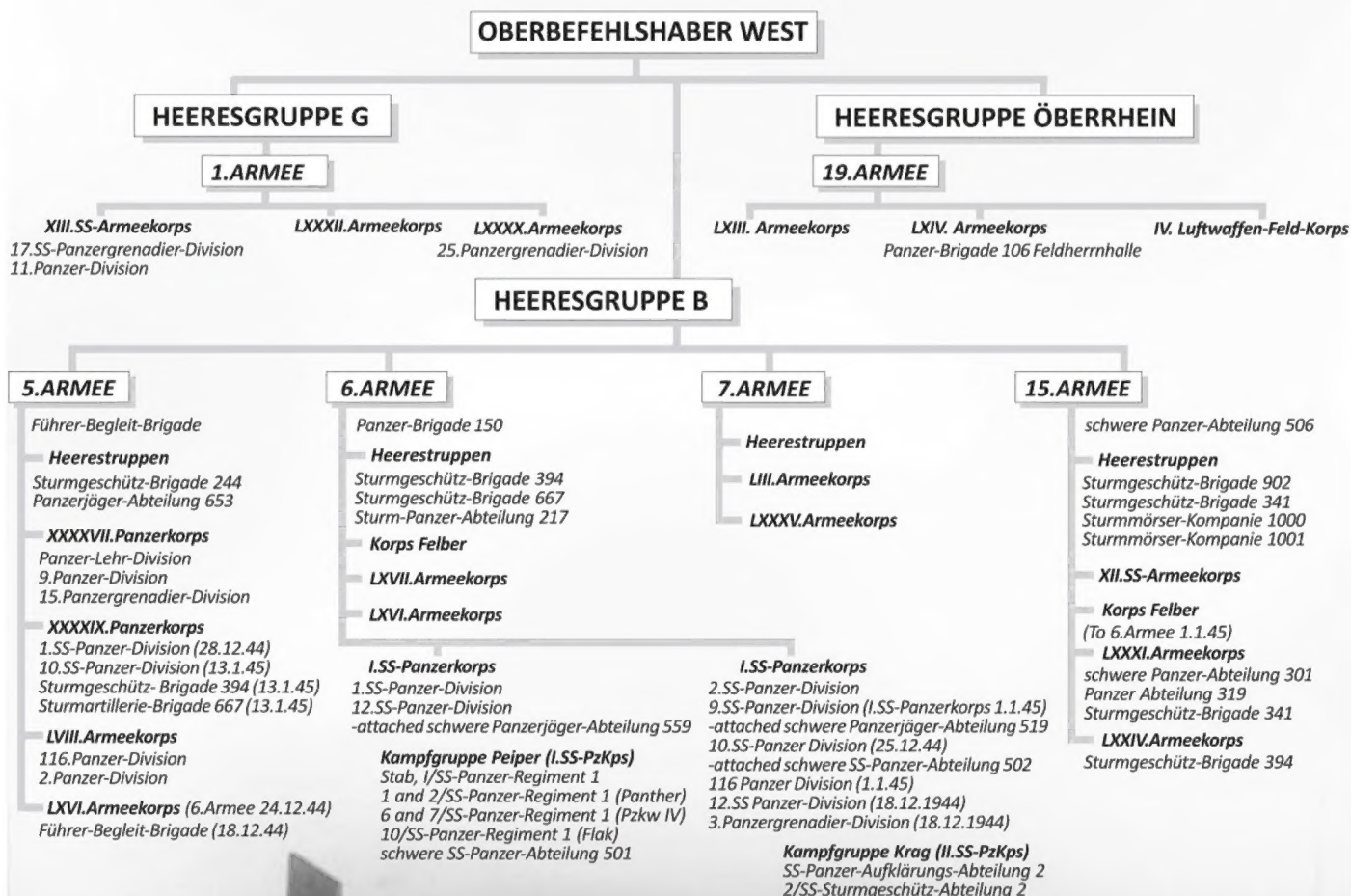


This photograph shows a Bergepanzer III recovery vehicle and although it has quite obviously been taken at the same time as the photograph shown above, there is no record of 9. Panzer-Division having any of these vehicles on hand. One possible candidate is 15. Panzergrenadier-Division which did operate in this area and had five of these vehicles on strength prior to the battle. (NARA)



THE GERMAN ARMOUR IN THE WEST, DECEMBER 1944

The German armed forces suffered almost three-quarters of a million casualties between June and November 1944 in the defensive fighting in Normandy and the subsequent withdrawal across France. Although the Army had been able to re-inforce many of its units with personnel from the Kriegsmarine, the Luftwaffe, by extending the call-up age to all males between 16 and 60 years of age and by conscripting men who had previously been exempt as essential to the war effort, these new recruits were poorly trained. Such measures did however, allow the Army to increase its manpower strength on the Western Front from less than half a million at the beginning of December to almost one and a half million by the middle of the month. Despite their best efforts, the Germans could not hope to match the numerical superiority of the Allies who still enjoyed a two-to-one advantage in artillery and a twenty-to-one advantage in tanks. Crucially, the British and Americans could call on almost 14,000 combat aircraft - while the Luftwaffe had almost been completely driven from the sky. By December 1944, the German Army in the West was organized into four separate Heeresgruppen or army groups. Three of these army groups - Heeresgruppe H, B and G - were commanded by Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt, while a fourth - Heeresgruppe Oberrhein - came under the command of Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. The strongest of these army groups was Generalfeldmarschall Model's Heeresgruppe B which would provide the main strike force for the planned operation codenamed Wacht am Rhein - the Ardennes Offensive. Note that the order of battle shown below details armoured units only.



A Sturmgeschütz III ausf G of 3. Panzergrenadier-Division lies damaged and abandoned near Bastogne during the Ardennes Offensive. The division's unit insignia can be seen on the hull rear plate to the left of the vehicles number. The practice of displaying the tactical number at the front and rear of the vehicle - as opposed to the sides - was common within this division. (NARA)



A Jagdpanzer IV/70(V) possibly from SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 of 1.SS-Panzer-Division photographed near the Belgium-Luxembourg border between Bastogne and Wiltz. The so-called ambush style of camouflage pattern is quite clearly shown here. (NARA)



A Volkswagen type 82 nicknamed the Kübelwagen or bucket car, photographed in a Belgian village, apparently intact and perhaps even in working order. Remarkably hardy, the Americans found these vehicles to be the equal of the American jeep except for speed. (NARA)

Below: An Sdkfz 250 of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 103 of the 3rd Panzer Division photographed in Samrée, Belgium, about 30 kilometres south of Liège in January 1945. The vehicle is from the motorised anti-tank company. (NARA). At left is shown the rank insignia of an Unteroffizier, the two pieces of horizontal braid denoting an officer candidate, with a metal gothic P identifying an anti-tank unit and the metal Trenchard badge of the Panzer Corps (Auchincloss 2011)



At left: A Pzkw IV ausf H knocked out in Belgium during the winter of 1944/45. Below: These vehicles were badly damaged and abandoned near the town of Inden, 25 kilometres northeast of Aachen, during the heavy fighting which took place there in late November 1944 - although they were actually photographed in 1947. Both are from 3.Panzergranadier-Division, the Sturmgeschütz III belonging to 1.Kompanie, Panzer-Abteilung 3 and the Jagdpanzer IV is from 1.Kompanie, Panzerjäger-Abteilung 103. (NARA)





Although a rare site in 1944, some of these Sdkfz 233 schwere Panzerspähwagen armoured cars soldiered on until the war's end. This vehicle from 2. Panzer-Division was photographed near Celles in December 1944 and is shown and discussed further in the illustration section on page 17. At the front of the hull, above the towing hook, can be seen the division's unit insignia and the tactical sign denoting an armoured car platoon. (NARA)



Photographed in January 1945, this Pzkw V Panther ausf G was used to test the efficacy of the 90mm anti-tank shell. Of interest are the three bolts welded towards the rear of the turret - presumably there is another set supporting the length of spare track. Note how the impact of the 90mm shells has caused the zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste to fall away in large, rectangular segments. (NARA)





This photograph was taken on the Luxembourg-German border 20 kilometres southwest of Vianden on 21 February 1945. The Sturmgeschütz III auf G assault guns may have been used in the final German battle. No identifying markings are visible, except for the number 211 on the front of the vehicle, however both Panzerjäger-Abteilung 3 and the 211st Volksgrenadier-Division were active in the fighting for this area and both were equipped with this type of vehicle.

This photograph was also taken on the Luxembourg-German border at Dasburg, some 20 kilometres to the north and just one week later on 28 February 1945. The vehicles nearest the camera are a Sturmgeschütz III auf G and a Pzkw V Bergepanther recovery vehicle. (NARA)



An Sdkfz 10/4 2cm Flak 38 half-track photographed near Frauwüllesheim, 30 kilometres east of Aachen, on 28 February 1945. In the original print of this photograph it is possible to see that the gun, including the inside of the gun shield, has been painted in a camouflage pattern consisting of large patches of a darker colour. By this time many of these vehicles had semi-armoured cabs. (NARA). At left is the army anti-aircraft combat badge - or Heeres-Flak Kampfabzeichen - awarded to the crews of anti-aircraft guns and also searchlight and sound ranging troops. The award was based on a rather complicated points system and perhaps incongruously, actions against ground targets were not considered acceptable criteria. (Author's collection)



Photographed near Mödrath a suburb of Kerpen, some 15 kilometres east of Düren, in early March 1945, these two Sturmgeschütz III ausf G are almost certainly from 2 Kompanie, Panzer-Abteilung 103 of 3. Panzergrenadier-Division which defended this area in late February and early March. The lead vehicle is also shown and discussed in the illustration section on page 18. (NARA)



Sdkfz 251/1 ausf D. Panzergrenadier Bataillon 2108, Panzer-Brigade 108. France, late 1944. This half-track and four others were captured by the US Army and converted to carry the T-34 Calliope rocket system. Both the number 2311 and name of a former crew member - Heinrich Hötger, killed in September 1944 - are repeated on the right side of the hull in exactly the same style. The Shark insignia was also carried at the rear on the right hand side mudguard.



3.7cm Flak 43 auf schwere Werhmachtsschlepper. Unknown unit. France, late 1944. Developed as a transport vehicle by Büssing-NAG in 1943, less than 1,000 of these vehicles were built in both an armoured and un-armoured version as shown here. Only the armoured version however was fitted with the 3.7cm anti-aircraft gun in production, the rest being field modifications. A large white letter G was painted inside the gun shield just above the barrel and probably indicated a Batterie.



Sturmgeschütz III auf G. Unit unknown. France, late 1944. Photographed near Thionville which was part of the Metz defensive system, this assault gun may have belonged to Panzerjäger-Abteilung 119 of 19.Volksgrenadier-Division.



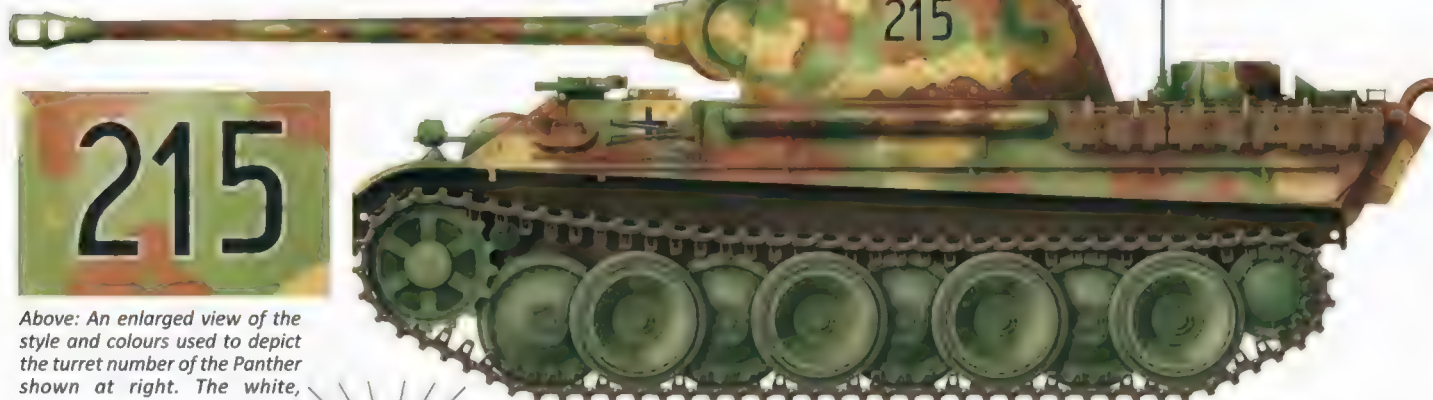
Sdkfz 251/6 ausf C. Unit uncertain. Belgium, December 1944. Photographed near Jodenville, 7 kilometres south-west of Bastogne, this command half-track may be from the Panzer-Lehr-Division which was operating there at that time. At left is an example of the method used to display the division's unit insignia or Truppenkennzeichen, in late 1944 and early 1945.



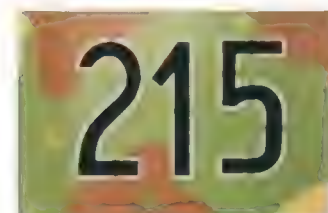


Panzer IV/70(A). Führer-Begleit-Brigade. Belgium, December 1944. Part of this unit's armoured component was formed from II Abteilung, Panzer Regiment Grossdeutschland which had 38 of these vehicles on hand in December.

Right: The unit insignia of the Führer-Begleit-Brigade. It is uncertain which vehicles, if any, carried the marking during the fighting in the Ardennes.



Above: An enlarged view of the style and colours used to depict the turret number of the Panther shown at right. The white, broken outline and solid black centre were common to all the tanks of the regiment's I Abteilung. The number was repeated in the same style, but at approximately half size, on the turret rear just below the commander's cupola and level with the access door.

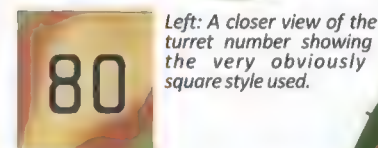


Pzkw V Panther ausf G. 2 Kompanie, I Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Belgium, December 1944. Knocked out at Stoumont about 15 kilometres west of Malmédy this tank was photographed from several different angles providing us with a good overall view of the camouflage scheme - indicative of Panthers produced by Daimler Benz in September 1944 - and markings.

Sdkfz 234/2 Puma. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2. Belgium, December 1944. During the Ardennes Offensive this unit had 10 of these vehicles on hand as part of Kampfgruppe von Böhm - the advance guard of 2. Panzer-Division - made up of this battalion and a number of Panthers. Cut off near Dinant fewer than 200 men escaped and all heavy equipment had to be abandoned with Hauptmann von Böhm and 148 of his men were taken prisoner.



Above: The unit insignia - or Truppenkennzeichen - of 2. Panzer-Division. Also of note is the Truppe number 8 painted in white on the mudguard between the first and second wheel. Apparently vehicles of this unit whose turret number ended in 1 had white numbers while those that ended in 2 used a dark colour, possibly black.



Left: A closer view of the turret number showing the very obviously square style used.



Pzkw V Panther ausf G. Panzer Regiment 33, 9. Panzer-Division. Belgium, December 1944. Abandoned on the outskirts of Humain, some 30 kilometres north-west of Bastogne, this tank was subsequently towed to the centre of the town and photographed from several different angles. The regiment had 57 Panthers available on 14 December and all were concentrated in II Abteilung. The number 80 almost certainly denotes the battalion's 8th company and may identify the company commander.

Sdkfz 233 (7.5 cm) Schwere Panzerspähwagen. 2. Panzer-Division. Belgium, late 1944. The first of these vehicles had been received by the division in May 1943 and it is possible that this heavy armoured car may be one of those. Given the date and location of the photograph on which our illustration is based it is likely that this vehicle has at least some connection to the Sdkfz 234/2 Puma of Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2 attached to Kampfgruppe von Böhm during the Ardennes Offensive.

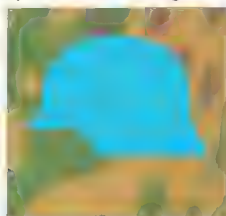


Sturmgeschütz III auf G. Possibly 5 Kompanie, Panzerjäger-Abteilung 61, 11. Panzer-Division. Germany, early 1945. The possible identification of this vehicle is based on the location at which it was photographed - in the Hunsrück area of western Germany - the style of marking and the assumption that any other possible candidates would have been unlikely to have fielded a 5th company. By January 1945 the battalion had lost all but two of its assault guns.

Above: The 2. Panzer-Division unit insignia and the tactical sign denoting an armoured car platoon.



Below: The unit insignia of the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade. The connection of this unit and the Führer-Begleit-Brigade with the Grossdeutschland division is emphasised in its design.



Sdkfz 251/17. Führer-Grenadier-Brigade. Luxembourg, December 1944. A number of these 2cm armed half-tracks and several assault guns were destroyed in an attack on the town of Heiderscheid approximately 20 kilometres south-east of Bastogne. The number 214 is somewhat speculative, only the first two digits being visible in our photograph.



Pzkw VI Tiger I. Unit uncertain. Germany, Spring 1945. Abandoned between the towns of Detmold and Berlebeck - almost certainly on the Paderborner Strasse - this battered Tiger I may belong to Panzer Gruppe Paderborn. This unit was formed in March 1945 from the tanks of Panzer-Lehr und Ausbildungs-Abteilung Tiger, a training unit, which was able to field 15 Tiger I and 3 Tiger II tanks. By 12 April all the unit's vehicles had either been destroyed or abandoned.

Sturmgeschütz III ausf G. 2 Kompanie, Panzerjäger-Abteilung 103, 3. Panzergrenadier-Division. Germany, March 1945. Photographed outside the village of Mödrath, approximately 15 kilometres west of Cologne, this assault gun unit can be identified by the distinctive method of displaying the vehicle's number at the front and rear of the hull.



Panzerbefehlswagen IV. Unit unknown. Germany, early 1945. This command tank, based on an early ausf G model, was captured almost intact by US troops. The name RITA painted on the main gun, although almost certainly coincidental, is reminiscent of the system used by II Abteilung of SS-Panzer Regiment 12 during the Normandy battles.



Pzkw V Panther ausf D. Unit uncertain. Germany, spring 1945. Photographed in the streets of Bamberg this early model Panther may belong to Panzer-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 35. The markings certainly resemble those used on other Panthers of the unit which was based in that area. Note the skull insignia painted on the rear stowage bin. The enlarged view is necessarily speculative as the image is unclear in the photograph on which our illustration is based.



Pzkw III. Panzer-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 35. Germany, spring 1945. Photographed in company with several other older tanks in the ruins of the battalion's workshop this vehicle is also shown and discussed on page 23.

Both photographs on this page show the same Panzer IV/70(A) in the streets of the small town of Mittlewihr, just north of Colmar, in France. This vehicle was knocked out when 7.Kompanie, Panzer Regiment 2, which had been attached to Panzer-Brigade 106 Feldherrnhalle, attempted to take the town in December 1944. The wire mesh skirt or Drahtgeflecht Schürzen is missing from the driver's side of the vehicle although the skirt for the other side is still in place. In the original print of both photographs it is possible to discern a solid black Balkenkreuz at the very top of the crew compartment, to the right of the gun mantlet. The ferocity of the fighting here, which lasted until January 1945 is evident in the destruction shown in these photographs and indeed only a small part of the town's medieval church and a wall at the entry of the village are all that remain today. (NARA)



Photographed in Baden on 7 March 1945, these two Sdkfz 251/1 ausf D half-tracks are being used as transport by their new owners, men of the US 5th Infantry Division. In the original print of this photograph a number beginning with 6 and possibly followed by a 3, is just visible to the rear of the Jerrycan on the hull side of the nearest vehicle. (NARA)



The official caption of this photograph states that this 15cm Panzerwerfer 42 auf Maultier was one of six captured near the village of Fussingen by units of the US 7th Armoured Division. The division swept through this area on 26 March advancing almost 25 kilometres reaching the Dillenburg-Wetzlar road, approximately 60 kilometres north of Frankfurt, by the evening of the next day. Although it is not possible to identify the unit, 16.Volks-Werfer-Brigade had been attached to LXVI. Armeekorps, the closest German formation to 7th Armoured Division's advance, since December 1944 when the brigade had 12 of these vehicles on hand and although the brigade staff had been transferred further north on 23 March, some units may still have been in the area. (NARA)



This Pzkw V Panther ausf G was photographed in the town of Kelberg, approximately 30 kilometres west of Koblenz on 11 March 1945. The town was captured on 3 March by units of the US 11th Armoured Division and according to the American account, was defended by six German tanks including one Tiger II. In early March, General von Manteuffel's 5. Panzerarmee was retreating through this area and this Panther may have belonged to either 2. Panzer-Division, 9. Panzer-Division or 3. Panzergrenadier-Division. The only unit on the Western Front equipped with the Tiger II at this time, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506, was however fighting much further to the north. (NARA)



At left: A page from the Pantherfibel, an instruction manual produced for trainee Panther crews which imparted technical information in an often light hearted manner. Here a gunner is presenting the tank's 7.5cm gun to Saint Barbara, the patron saint of the artillery. Also shown is the Panzer Marksman's badge which was normally reserved for parades and worn with a corded lanyard at the right shoulder. At the rear is the Metz campaign cuff title instituted on 24 October 1944 and awarded to any soldier who had served for at least seven days with Kampfgruppe Siegroth, which had defended the city, or was wounded during the siege. (Author's collection)

Photographed in Haiger east of Cologne on 29 March 1945, this Pzkw V Panther ausf G was part of an ad hoc force coordinated by the headquarters of General Bayerlein's LIII Corps and was made up from parts of 176. Infanterie-Division, 3. Panzergrenadier-Division and Panzer-Lehr-Division - the latter having only ten of these tanks on hand at the time. (NARA)





A 7.5 cm PaK (Panzerabwehrkanone) 40, dug in and heavily camouflaged, sighted to cover a flat, open field. These guns were capable of engaging and destroying Allied tanks at ranges of up to 1,800 metres and could be easily concealed, as shown here. The German army relied heavily on these weapons and during the surge in armament production that took place between January and September 1944, over 7,000 were allocated to units. Note that a considerable amount of whitewash camouflage is visible on the gun's barrel and breech, although it is difficult to be certain, it appears that the gun's wheels have been removed. (NARA)

Although it is generally agreed that this Sturmgeschütz IV assault gun was knocked out by units of the US 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion, there is some controversy regarding the date and the location of this photograph with some sources giving January 1945 near Rimling and others, 9 March near Helfengerhoff. The official caption agrees with the March date but gives Brandelfengerhoff as the location. The date of this photograph is plainly not January, when the ground was covered in snow. On 2 March, in support of the US 200th Division, the battalion was near Bitche in France less than 10 kilometres from the German border with US intelligence reports placing 17.SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division less than a kilometre away at Schorbach. A few kilometres to the north, across the German border there are a multitude of towns named in the Helfengerhoff-Brandelfengerhoff style - although I have not been able to locate an exact match anywhere in Germany. The only other unit thought to have had any serviceable Sturmgeschütz IV at this time, Panzer Regiment 3 of 2.Panzer-Division, was far to the north near Wittlich. This would strongly suggest that this vehicle - named Kunigunde, a girl's name - did belong to SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 17. (NARA)






Both photographs on this page depict Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzer tank destroyers, almost certainly from the same unit, knocked out near the fortress town of Bitche, some 40 kilometres southeast of Saarbrücken in early March 1945. Although there are no identifying markings on either vehicle, the only unit close to the town at that time equipped with the Hetzer was the Sturmgeschütz company of Panzerjäger-Abteilung(mot) 1316 from 16.Volks-Grenadier-Division, which had originally been issued with 14 of these diminutive tank destroyers in early December. The factory applied camouflage is typical of vehicles manufactured by the Boemisch-Mährische Maschinenfabrik works and visible in the original print of this photograph, just to the left of the damaged turret headlight is a matte black rectangle which, from October 1944, was painted on the hull in an effort to decoy enemy gunners away from the drivers visor and vision block. (NARA)


Photographed in Bamberg, inside the very heavily damaged workshop of Panzer- Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 35, can be seen a Pzkw V Panther ausf D, a Pzkw IV ausf G and - closest to the camera - an early Pzkw III which is too badly damaged to categorize accurately. Interestingly the latter is fitted with a turret from a Tauchpanzer - tanks which were modified to run underwater - identified by the flange around the bottom edge of the turret. This vehicle is also shown in the illustration section on page 18. This battalion was the training and replacement unit of Panzer Regiment 35 of 4. Panzer-Division and attempted to defend the town of Bamberg from approaching US units with veteran tanks such as these in April 1945. (NARA)



An abandoned Pzkw V Panther ausf A is used as cover by soldiers of the US 4th Cavalry Group on 2 March 1945. The official caption gives the location as Flesch, however I have been unable to locate a similarly named town in western Germany and this may in fact be Frechen just outside Cologne which was, according to the published US 12th Army Group situation map for 2 March, right on the front line. If the German dispositions recorded on the map are correct, this tank is probably from Panzer Regiment 33 of 9. Panzer-Division. (NARA)



This Pzkw V Panther ausf G from Panzer Regiment 15 of 11. Panzer-Division was photographed near Fernegierscheid in early April 1945. This division was part of the counterattack against the Remagen bridgehead which began on 23 March. In mid March, prior to the fighting around Remagen, the division reported that its armoured strength had been reduced to 33 of these Panther tanks together with 17 Pzkw IV tanks and 6 assault guns. The town of Fernegierscheid is approximately 20 kilometres northeast of Remagen. (NARA)

[illegible]



Photographed in the heavily damaged railway yard at Aschaffenburg, these Pzkw V Panther turrets were probably being transported in this manner to be used as Pantherstellung fixed emplacements. The turret would be mounted on the purpose built Stahlunterstand, basically a metal bunker, which was then buried. Note the elaborate camouflage pattern on the nearest turret. This town in Bavaria was the scene of a particularly savage battle between 28 March and 3 April 1945. The defence was undertaken by various ad hoc units made up from men of the Volksturm and Waffen-SS. (NARA)



A Panzer IV/70(A) sits by the roadside in Ober Bessenbach, less than 5 kilometres southwest of Aschaffenburg. This photograph was taken on the morning of 1 April 1945, only hours after the town was captured. (NARA)

TIMELINE

- 06.01.45. As part of Operation Nordwind, 21.Panzer-Division begins an attack south from Wissembourg.
- 08.01.45. German units are given permission to withdraw from the Ardennes salient leaving as a rearguard parts of 340.Volksgrenadier-Division and tanks of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501.
- 09.01.45. Kampfgruppe Heuchtinger effectively the remnants of 21.Panzer-Division and 25.Panzergrenadier-Division - begin attacks against the salient at Wissembourg as part of Nordwind.
- 12.01.45. Operation Nordwind is halted 13 miles from Strasbourg. British and U.S. forces link up in the Laroche area.
- 16.01.45. 10.SS-Panzer-Division spearheads the drive south from Lauterbourg through Seltz, 2 miles west of the Rhine River, in an attempt to seize the Gamsheim bridgehead.
- 17.01.45. 10.SS-Panzer-Division in action at Herrlisheim, south of Hagenau.
- 22.01.45. Heeresgruppe G and Heeresgruppe Oberrhein link up but are unable to force a crossing of the Moselle River.
- 28.01.45. The last German units withdraw from the Ardennes salient.
- 04.02.45. The last German troops leave Belgium.
- 07.02.45. The Germans destroy the floodgates in the Ruhr flooding the area West of Cologne and preventing the use of assault bridges.
- 08.02.45. British and Canadian troops launch an offensive into the Reichswald.
- 09.02.45. The last Rhine bridge is destroyed in the Colmar Pocket after much of 19.Armee had been evacuated.
- 10.02.45. US units capture the last of the Ruhr dams.
- 12.02.45. British and Canadian troops capture Cleve.
- 17.02.45. The US 3rd Army breaks through the Siegfried Line and advances into Germany.
- 23.02.45. US 9th Army attacks from the Roer bridgehead towards the Hürtgen Forest but is bogged down in savage fighting.
- 28.02.45. US units in the Hürtgen Forest break through near Erkelenz, west of Cologne at great cost.
- 06.03.45. Cologne surrenders.
- 07.03.45. The Rhine bridge at Remagen captured intact.
- 09.03.45. The US 3rd Army crosses the Rhine at Remagen.
- 10.03.45. Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring replaces von Rundstedt as Oberbefehlshaber West.
- 12.02.45. Kampfgruppe Dunker - formed from Feld-Ersatz-Bataillon 3 and stragglers from 116.Panzer-Division - attempts to defend Beckum with four Tigers rendered inoperable due to lack of fuel.
- 14.03.45. US 3rd Army crosses the Moselle.
- 15.03.45. Attempts to expand the Remagen bridgehead fail.
- 17.03.45. The Remagen bridge collapses.
- 20.03.45. Saarbrücken falls.
- 21.03.45. US units advance from Remagen toward Siegburg.
- 22.03.45. Units of the US 3rd Army cross the Rhine at Oppenheim south of Mainz against ineffective German resistance.
- 23.03.45. British and Canadian units begin their assault on the Siegfried Line.
- 24.03.45. The British launch operation Plunder. US troops capture Speyer and Ludwigshafen.
- 25.03.45. British troops capture Wesel after an aerial bombardment almost completely destroys the town.

h Sdkfz. 11 PKL. The German tank translates literally as "armored car," and it was actually applied to vehicles to indicate its small size. Here the product, a light carrying vehicle, is shown in a muddy, wooded area. The tankette had original tracks, but the tracks were replaced with rubber tracks.

A black and white photograph showing a bulldozer in the process of pushing a large, dark pile of rubble or debris. The bulldozer is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right. Its blade is lowered and in contact with the pile of debris. The background is a light, hazy area, possibly a construction site or a cleared area. The ground is uneven and covered with dirt and small stones.



[illegible]

Above, far left: The Grossdeutschland cuff title worn here by an NCO instructor photographed in 1945. At right, top to bottom: The Feldherrnhalle cuff title, worn in the west by the units of Panzer-Brigade 106. The army's Feldherrnhalle units adopted some of the traditions of the Sturm-Abteilung unit of the same name including the brown background colour of the cuff band and the Siegrune worn on the shoulder straps; The Grossdeutschland cuff title worn in the west by the Führer-Begleit-Brigade, the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade and later by Panzerjäger-Abteilung GD; The cuff title worn by units of 1.SS-Panzer-Division; The cuff title worn by members of 17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division. All are either embroidered or woven in silver for officers and grey for other ranks and all except the Feldherrnhalle cuff title are on a black band. At left: a) Enlisted ranks shoulder strap worn by the 1.SS-Panzer-Division. b) Shoulder strap for NCO's of the GD-Division, Führer-Begleit-Brigade and the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade. c) Oberleutnant of Panzer-Brigade 106. d) Major, Panzer-Lehr-Division. e) Panzer Assault badge, awarded for taking part in three armoured actions.



An assortment of Pzkw III tanks, including three ausf N models closest to the camera, all with coatings of zimmerit paste. These tanks are from Panzer-Abteilung Norwegen based in Oslo, Norway. This unit was originally formed from the 2nd and 3rd companies of I Abteilung, Panzer Regiment 9 of 25. Panzer-Division in September 1943. According to the official caption to this photograph, the battalion had 71 tanks on hand at the time of the German surrender. (NARA)



Photographed in the last days of the war, this Sdkfz 251/16 ausf D Flammpanzerwagen of 16. Panzer-Division is being used to transport refugees towards the American lines. This division retreated through Poland into Czechoslovakia and in the confused fighting of May 1945, some elements managed to reach the American lines. The division's unit insignia - probably in yellow - and the tactical symbol denoting a tank company - almost certainly in white - can be seen above and to the right of the vehicle's registration number. (NARA)

General der Panzertruppen Maximilian Freiberr von Edelsheim, commander of XXXXVIII Panzerkorps and officers of his staff, return to the east bank of the Elbe after receiving surrender terms from the Chief of Staff of the US 9th Army. Of note is the corps unit insignia painted on the side of the car and the notation - partly obscured - which reads: Gen.Kom XXXXVIII Pz Kps. This type of detailed identification - although obviously detrimental to security - was commonly seen late in the war and was not restricted to command or rear area vehicles. The small metal flag in front of the headlight also identifies a corps command. (NARA)

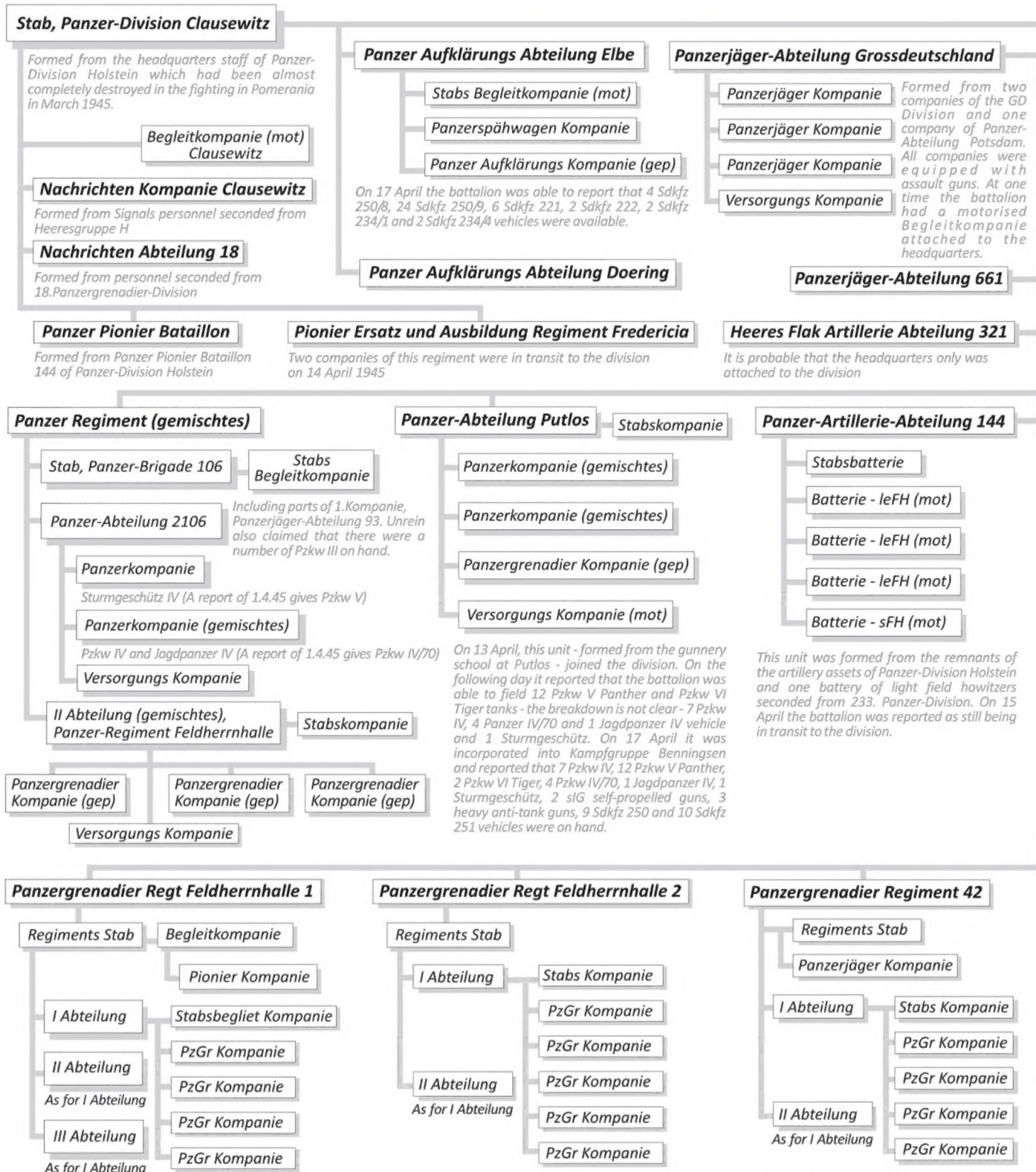


Officers of 116. Panzer-Division taken prisoner at Menden, south of Hamm, by troops of the US 7th Armoured Division including the division's Operations Officer, Oberst Heinz-Günther Guderian wearing the black uniform of the Panzer troops. The son of the famous Generaloberst Heinz Wilhelm Guderian, he served throughout the conflict being wounded twice during the 1940 French campaign. He survived the war and served as Inspector of Armoured troops - the same position held by his father - in the Bundeswehr before retiring in 1974. (NARA)



CLAUSEWITZ, THE LAST PANZER DIVISION

Ordered into existence on 4 April 1945, barely five weeks before the end of the war, Panzer-Division Clausewitz was typical of the ad-hoc formations created in the last months of the conflict. Incredibly, the division was expected to be ready for operations by 8 April and was originally to be formed from elements of a Panzer replacement unit and an anti-tank battalion from Panzergrenadier-Division Grossdeutschland with units of the 325. Infanterie-Division. However, both the armour and infantry units were engaged at the front and could not be spared. On 6 April, new orders were issued stating that Panzer-Division Clausewitz would be organised from remnants of various units. These would eventually include Panzer-Division Holstein, 233. Reserve-Panzer-Division and the tanks of the Schiess-Schule Putlos. Although the new division lacked transport and sufficient numbers of armoured vehicles, many of its personnel were combat veterans or instructors and the division's commander, Generalmajor Martin Unrein, was a highly experienced and competent officer. The division's first engagement took place on 12 April 1945, when tanks and infantry stopped a strong British attack near the town of Uelzen. Fighting continuously, by the last days of April 1945, the division had been reduced to a battle group of an undersized infantry regiment and barely a company of tanks. During its brief existence, three of the division's men - Major Gustav Walle, Leutnant Friedrich Anding and Obergefreiter Johann Stütze, all of Panzerjäger-Abteilung Grossdeutschland, were either nominated for, or awarded the Knight's Cross.



The division's original complement of armoured infantry was provided by Panzergrenadier-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Regiment Feldherrnhalle which was officially attached on 6 April 1945. A training and replacement unit, it comprised three battalions totally 3,321 men and despite its title, had no transport for its Panzergrenadier companies which were in effect ordinary infantry units. It would appear that soon after joining the division, the regiment was reduced from three to two battalions with the surplus personnel forming a second regiment. As can be seen above, the regiments were then referred to as Feldherrnhalle 1 and 2 and this is first noted in a report of 12 April 1945. Confusingly, reports for 17 and 28 April both show Feldherrnhalle 1 as having three battalions, the latter report referring to "III/Panzergrenadier Ers u Aus Regt Feldherrnhalle". It is likely that the re-organisation was indeed carried out - as required by the new establishments created on 25 March - but that as replacements arrived, as they continued to do until at least 17 April, a new battalion was formed. Attached to the division on 6 April 1945, Panzergrenadier Regiment 42 was formed from the remnants of 233. Panzer-Division, a reserve formation. Motorised transport was provided for the Panzerjäger Kompanie only. It should be remembered that units were added to the division as they arrived and that some never did. Also, battle casualties and constant re-organisations meant that the order of battle changed on an almost daily basis. The table shown above therefore represents the division in mid-April 1945.

Below: Sdkfz 251/22. 11. Panzer-Division. Germany, Spring 1945. These vehicles were intended to replace Sdkfz 251/9 half-tracks in the reconnaissance units of armoured divisions and the heavy weapons companies of Panzergrenadier battalions.



Above: In addition to factory produced models mounting the 7.5cm Pak 40 anti-tank gun, conversion sets for the same armament were issued to units from late 1944 with the order that all Sdkfz 251/9 vehicles were to be modified. Many units however continued to refer to the converted half-tracks by their original designation and the 16 that this division reported as being available on 30 December may have been armed with the new gun. At far right is a rear view of the vehicle and an enlarged example of the division's unit insignia.



Above: Sdkfz 234/1. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 125, 25. Panzergrenadier-Division. Germany, Spring 1945. At far left is the division's unit insignia. The hard edge style of camouflage was commonly seen on these late production armoured cars.

Above: A rear view of the vehicle depicted at right showing the placement of the tank's number on the turret rear.

Above: Pzkw V Panther ausf D. Unit uncertain. Germany, Spring 1945. The markings displayed by this elderly Panther are very similar to known examples seen on the tanks of the Panzerschiess-Schule Putlos which by this date had been attached to Panzer-Division Clausewitz.

Zugkraftwagen 3t Sdkfz 11. Unit unknown, Germany, spring 1945. The production version of these vehicles normally mounted a 2cm Flak 38, meaning that this is almost certainly a field modification. Further, the MG151/15 Drilling gun arrangement is unusual in having a full length shield covering both the gun and pedestal. The ammunition case shown here on the side of the pedestal is missing in the photograph on which our illustration is based.

